

sin, salvation, and grace.

LESSON THREE

SIN, SALVATION & GRACE

What is sin?

Sin is disobeying God. As St. John tells us, "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). Sin is the violation of any commandment of God: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Sin is the rejection of God and of all the good things that come from him. If this sounds too strong, consider these words of our Lord: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Sin is the opposite of love; therefore, sin is hatred for God, the rejection of the world as God made it, and the attempt to be our own gods. In the book of Genesis (see Chapter 3, especially verse 5), we read that the devil tempted Adam and Eve by telling them that they could become gods themselves by disobeying the One True God.¹

What is "original righteousness"?

"Original righteousness" is the created state of the human race: that is, man as God created man to be, in God's own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). Man and the universe (the world, or created nature) were made good by God, and they only became subject to death, decay, and evil later, in the fall of man. God tells us the truth in Genesis, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (1:31).²

God is spirit, that is, eternal life without a body or any other limit (John 4:24), so the

image and likeness of God is spiritual, not primarily physical (although the incarnation of Jesus Christ indicates that even man's physical nature can be conformed to the image and likeness of God (see Hebrews 1:1-4). Man in God's image is united to God, united within himself, morally good, intelligent, capable of moral choice (the true meaning of "free will"), capable of love, and immortal.

It is important to note that man is by creation an indivisible union of body, soul, and spirit (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12). God forms Adam from the dust of the earth, breathes his Spirit/Life into his nostrils, and makes him "a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). Body, soul, and spirit are not parts, in the sense of a machine that can properly be taken apart. When Christ "gives up the ghost" (the spirit of life) on the cross, he dies (John 19:30). Death is the division of man's created unity.³

Man is the prime example of "the sacramental principle": the use of an outward, physical sign to show the spiritual life, goodness, and grace of God.⁴ The creation of the physical world is, in and of itself, a sacramental sign of God's goodness and love. Mankind, as first created, is the sacramental expression of God's person (image and likeness). In the division of sacramental labor among the members of the human race, man is the sacrament of God and woman is the sacrament of creation (see Ephesians 5:20-33).⁵

In other words, we learn about what mankind is supposed to be by studying God's revelation of himself (of which created humanity is a major part). Unfortunately, because man is now fallen, we cannot study mankind to learn about God at this time, with the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is "original sin"?

Original sin is the sin of Adam and the effects of Adam's sin as inherited by all of his descendants: that is, the human race. Original sin is the perversion of mankind's created nature, the corruption of original righteousness, the inborn weakness of the human character that predisposes all men and women to sin (see Article IX, BCP 604, where original sin is also called "birth sin").⁶

Another name for this weakness is "fallenness," because Adam "fell into sin," falling away from the created goodness he had received from God. The of the human race affected

not only Adam, Eve, and all of their descendants, but the whole of created nature (see Romans 8:19-23, for the fall of nature with man; see Psalm 51:5, for the fallenness of the entire human race, so that we are conceived in human sinfulness).⁷

How could the sin of two people affect the whole world?

Actually, it was the sin of one man that changed mankind, and the world with it. Adam's sin was the real fall, not Eve's (see Romans 5:12). Until he sinned himself, Adam still had the option of throwing himself on God's mercy and offering himself as a sacrifice for Eve's sin, just as the only other totally innocent man who has ever lived, our Lord Jesus Christ, actually did for us all.

But let's begin at the beginning. Who was Adam's father? The answer, according to the Scriptures, is God (Luke 3:38). Man is not an animal. God created man separately from the rest of nature, forming him from the dust of the earth, breathing the Spirit of life into him, making him in His own image and likeness (see Genesis 1:25-28; 2:7). God made man to have dominion over the earth, not merely to be a part of nature. Mankind is the purpose of creation (see Psalm 8). The earth was created as a training ground, a kind of "Sunday School" to prepare created beings made in God's image and likeness for eternal fellowship with Him.

Note also, the entire human race is derived from Adam, including Eve, who was not a separate creation but made from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:22; 1 Timothy 2:13).

The body and physical nature are the means that God has provided for the spiritual life of mankind. This principle is easier to grasp if we remember that the most spiritual act in history was the death of one man on a cross. This is the same fact that permits bread and wine to be the outward and visible sign of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, (I would suggest for consideration the idea that Christ is "attached" to the bread and wine in the same way that Christ is "attached" to the body born in Bethlehem, in the same way that Adam, you, and I are "attached" to our bodies: namely, God's fiat or spiritual commandment.)

The sin in the Garden was the sacramental sin of disobeying physically the spiritual commandment of God not to eat of the fruit of a particular tree, the penalty for which was

death (Genesis 2:16-17). "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and "the tree of life" (Genesis 3:22) were not magic trees: they were sacramental trees (outward and visible signs).

Although Eve ate of the forbidden fruit first, it was Adam that God held responsible for the first sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23). It was Adam who was created to be a son of God (remember: Christ alone is the uncreated, eternal, only-begotten Son of God); Adam who was given headship over the human race and physical creation to imitate God's good rulership over all. Adam dragged all humanity and all creation down with him.

What is most frightening about Adam's sin is how totally unnecessary it was. Adam already had everything, including eternal life, freedom, and personal fellowship with God. Adam chose death and depravity for himself and for mankind. An analogy would be a President of the United States who pushed the button starting a nuclear war, simply because he felt like abusing his authority. All his people would suffer, and any survivors would always have to live with the results of his action, both in terms of environmental and genetic damage.

If Adam had everything, what is evil?

Evil is not a thing. There is no created evil. God repeatedly tells us that everything he created is good (see Genesis 1). In the theological language of the Church, evil is called "a privation of good," meaning the perversion or spoiling of some good thing that God has made. Evil has no existence of its own, so there « no "self-existing" (substantial) evil."⁸

Evil is a way of acting, the chosen rejection of God by some creature endowed with a free will. Thus, sin is the perversion of freedom; lust, hate, and apathy are the perversions of love; gluttony is the perversion of enjoyment; idolatry is the perversion of worship; cancer is the perversion of growth; and so forth, endlessly to our shame and destruction. The devil is not a god, and he has no power to create "evil things."⁹

we need to see, then, that evil and sin are fundamentally identical. The evil and other fallen angels were the first to commit evil by rebelling against

God before the creation of the world (see Ezekiel 28:14-19; Revelation 12:7-! The devil insinuates himself into the Garden to spread the contagion of sin to mankind, and mankind willingly, voluntarily begins to sin. The devil's against God is pointless, of

course, as is all evil. Evil is not able to overcome the devil cannot create or even destroy: he can only spoil and ruin.

Why does a good God tolerate evil?

God tolerates evil, first of all, because he loves all his creatures, even those who are most rebellious. His creation is a kind of covenant, a promise that he will not take away the life he has given, even from those who do wrong (see Malachi 3:6). God has also made a covenant of free will with angels (created spirits without bodies) and mankind (created spirits with bodies). If we are to more than pets and puppets, we must be able to disobey as well as obey, and to experience freely the consequences of both (see, for example, God's covenant with his people, including the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience, in Deuteronomy 28). God does, however, intervene in the lives of his free creatures, both to protect the freedom of his own sovereign will for their good, and in response to prayer (an act of his creatures' free will).

How do we know what evil (sin) is?

People have known throughout history that something is terribly wrong with mankind and the world. Things fall apart. Men and women harm one another, and they are incapable of doing all the good things they intend. It is as if mankind has some terrible disease. We hurt even the people we love the most.

God's revelation in the Bible, made to his first chosen people and to the Church, teaches us what the disease is: disobedience to his will, or sin (see Romans 7:14-25).

How do we learn the will of God?

The Bible reveals to us the will of God, not only from the perspective of this world, but from God's own perspective (see Deuteronomy 4:10; Matthew 4:4). The entire Bible is the explanation of God's will in creation and in redemption (see Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; as well as Articles VI and VII, BCP 603-604). Christians are bound today by the entirety of the Scriptures, with the exception of the specifically civil and ritual law of the ancient Israel, now superseded by the fulfillments and ordinances of the New Testament Israel, the Church.¹⁰

We learn especially about God's will in the Old Testament in the Ten Commandments

(Exodus 20:1-17). In the New Testament, our Lord explains the will and law of God in the Summary of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40), when he teaches us to love God with our whole hearts, our whole souls, and our whole minds; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This Summary of the Law, of course, is no new teaching. Our Lord is quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19-18. The moral teaching of the Old and New Testaments is one, as God is one.

Where can I learn what the Church teaches about the Ten Commandments and the Summary of the Law?

The First Office of Instruction (BCP 285-289) provides a simple, but thorough, discussion of the Commandments and the Summary.

What are the consequences of sin?

The consequences of sin are separation from God (see Ephesians 4:17-19); war with my neighbor (see Genesis 4:6-8, 23-24); the weakening of my will and the destruction of my own integrity (Romans 7:19-25); and death (Romans 6:20-23).

What is separation from God?

Separation from God is hell (see Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15). Since God is the Creator and Source of all goodness and life (James 1:17), separation from God is separation from all good things and life itself. There is nothing more terrible than this separation. The "place" we call "Hell" is the permanent state of separation from God, but we experience hell any time we are separated from God by sin. We also call Hell "eternal death," because permanent separation from God is permanent separation from life (see Revelation 20:14-15).

In addition, since God made my neighbor, separation from God makes me my neighbor's enemy. We see these effects of sin in the Garden, immediately after mankind's fall. Adam blamed both God and Eve for his own sinfulness (Genesis 3:12).

Is there any remedy for sin?

Since all of mankind has fallen into both "original sin" (the fallenness and moral weakness of the human race through Adam) and "actual sin" (our own individual acts of disobedience against God), on our own we can do nothing about sin (see Romans 3:23 and

Psalm 49:7-9). We gave up our freedom to sin, making ourselves slaves to sin, so we are not free to help ourselves (see Romans 6:16,20-23; and see Article X, "Of Free Will," BCP 605).¹¹

Jesus Christ is the only salvation from sin because Jesus Christ alone is both God and a sinless human being (see Matthew 16:16-17; Hebrews 4:14-15; see also Article XV, "Of Christ Alone without Sin," BCP 605). Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Son of man. He is the "Christ," the "Messiah," the anointed one whom God has chosen to be the Savior of mankind and of the world (see Romans 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23,51-58; see also Article II, "Of the Word of Son of God, which was made very Man," BCP 603, and Article XVII, "Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ," BCP 606).

How does Jesus Christ save us?

Jesus Christ saves us by offering his life as a sacrifice for sin, in place of our own. This action is sometimes called "the substitutionary atonement," meaning that by his dying in our place for sin Christ has made us "at one" with his Father again. But whatever this fundamental truth of Christianity is called, it is the essence of the Gospel message, which must be believed for the sake of any human being's salvation (see, for example: Isaiah 53:12; John 1:29; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:28; and see Article XI, "Of the Justification of Man," BCP 605).¹²

Instead of condemning all men for sin eternally, God the Father chose to accept the voluntary sacrifice of his Son on our behalf, and on behalf of all the redeemed. God's created son, Adam, had rejected life. God's uncreated, only-begotten Son would give life back (1 Corinthians 15:22).

God used his dealings with the people of the Old Testament to teach them about sacrifice. He taught them that the only price of human life is human life itself (see Genesis 9:6), so that we would learn that sin is a matter of life and death. He taught them that the outward and visible sign of life is the blood (see Deuteronomy 12:23). He taught them to offer animals as sacrifices for their sins (Exodus 29:36, 30:10; Hebrews 9:22), as signs of their repentance, because! without repentance there can be no forgiveness (see Luke 13:3). (Note the interesting fact that "bloodshed" and "blessed" are etymologically versions of the

same word in English.)

But animals were not human beings, and they were not willing sacrifices for; sins. Only the sacrifice of a willing, sinless human being could be a true offering for the sin of mankind (Hebrews 9:7-12). So God provided a sacrifice (see! Genesis 22:8), his own Son, who voluntarily became a human being ("incarnate," "in the flesh") by the Holy Ghost, of the human flesh of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The purpose of the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the way, was not the mere display of God's power (or some sort of denial of the holiness of marriage under God). The Virgin Birth was the preparation of a victim who; would be by actual inheritance both God and man, without inheriting the fallen, sinful will of Adam (which we all inherit through our fallen, human fathers).¹³ Not only as God, but as a human being, Jesus Christ has the same Father that Adam had: God. Jesus Christ is the second Adam who gives his life for the redemption ("the buying back") of the children of the first Adam, so that by incorporation into the resurrected body of Christ (the Church) fallen men; can be new creatures, a new human race freed from sin to live with God forever (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; and see Lesson One).

In fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and killed on a cross. Since Christ's life belonged to Christ alone, only Christ could offer his life to the Father. He was raised from the dead by the power of God on the third day to become our Great High Priest, and he ascended into heaven to offer himself to the Father once for all and eternally for the remission of our sins (see Hebrews 10:1-23).

If Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, why do I still sin?

Jesus Christ did not die to make it impossible for us to be bad; he died to make it possible for us to be good. We are redeemed sinners, but we are sinners nevertheless. Jesus Christ's death did not take away our moral weakness as descendants of Adam: it gave us a new way of being good (see Article XVI, "Of Sin after Baptism," BCP 605).

What is this new way?

The new way of being good that Christ gave us is the joining of our imperfect lives with his perfect life by God's grace. Christ gave us the possibility of a new relationship with God,

as his adopted children by grace, to replace the relationship we had thrown away forever by sinning (see Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:4-7). We do not deserve this new relationship, but God in his love chooses us for it (see John 15:16; Ephesians 1:3-6). Jesus Christ calls this relationship the new testament in his own blood, which is shed for the remission of sin (cancellation of, pardon of, release from sin) (see Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).¹⁴

We cannot enter into this relationship on our own, or in any way but God's way (see John 3:3,5-8). God is absolutely in charge of our salvation, and we are powerless to live without him. Just as Lazarus could not leave the tomb and live until Jesus Christ called him (see John 11:43-44), we cannot live eternally until God calls us and makes us alive. The dead can do nothing, and we are dead in sin, until God quickens us (regenerates us, makes us born again) by his grace (see John 3:3,5-8 again; and Romans 4:17; Romans 6:3-5; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 2:13-14).

A true Christian life must begin with God's regeneration of our lives by grace. The character of our new lives in God's grace is the character of Jesus Christ himself, for by the power of God's grace and by baptism we are made the Body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 13:13,27; Ephesians 5:30). In Jesus Christ, as the members of his Body, by Christ's merits and Christ's alone, we are justified (accepted as righteous) before God the Father (see Romans 5:18-21; Titus 3:3-7). Our justification by God's grace in our Lord Jesus Christ does not mean that we become instantly perfect, as Christ is now, was, and ever will be perfect. But our justification does mean that when God the Father looks at us he does not see our sins and weakness but the strength and goodness of his Son Jesus Christ.

We are in Christ a new humanity, redeemed from sin (see Ephesians 4:17-24). We are new creatures, with a new life and a new purpose (see 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Moreover, what we could not do on our own as weak persons (our old sinful selves), we can now do by the power of God, joined to the perfectly good and perfectly strong person of Christ. When we are united with Christ in faith by baptism, he makes up for our weaknesses. When we fall into sin, we are not destroyed because we belong to Christ and not to sin. Christ gives us gifts of repentance and the forgiveness of our sins. Christ gives us grace to grow better, to

grow up into his own image and likeness, which is the image and likeness of God and what we were created to be in the first place (see Ephesians 4:7-16).

Jesus Christ is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). He preserves us unto eternal life, and he sanctifies us (makes us holy) by the gift of new life in him and the power of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 26-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17).

What is grace?

Grace is, first of all, God's pleasure in doing good, in being faithful to himself (see Ephesians 1:3-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 4:11). Grace is God's loving power, and we experience it in our lives as the free gift of participation in God's own life (see Ephesians 2:4-10). We experience grace as God's favor, as God's kindness, as God's help, as God's forgiveness, as the power to be good, as the authority to act in God's Name (see Ephesians 4:7-16; Hebrews 4:16). Grace enables us to do what we ought to do, and to be what we ought to be (see 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 15:9-11).

What is faith?

Faith is trust in God and his promises, the dedication of all that we are to loving and obeying God simply because he is God and deserving of all our love (see Luke 17:5-6; Romans 4:13-25).¹⁵ Faith is "the substance of things hoped for" (the "surety," the spiritual "bond" of our dependence on the reality of God's promises) and "the evidence of things unseen" (the spiritual "proof" that we act upon when we obey God) (see Hebrews 11:1, and see the rest of that chapter as the power and effects of faith are listed).

Faith is a gift of grace, and the necessary means of salvation: "For by grace; are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). We cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). We can not do good works without faith (see Article XII, "Of Good Works," and Article XIII, "Of Works before Justification," BCP 605).¹⁶ And that faith must be faith in Jesus Christ in particular. No other faith will do. As St. Paul tells us, "If all man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [accursed, appointed! for destruction]" (1 Corinthians 16:22). Only faith in Christ gives life:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and

gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

How do I get grace?

We receive grace as God's gift, through faith in Jesus Christ, and through God's action in the sacraments which Christ has provided for us, especially through Baptism and the Holy Communion (see Romans 5:15-17; 2 Corinthians 9:12-15; Ephesians 3:7; Ephesians 4:7).

We do not earn grace or deserve it. The good works that we do are the result of the grace that God gives us (1 Corinthians 12:6,11). We deserve nothing from God when we do good works in his Name because doing good is our created duty (Luke 17:7-10).

What is salvation?

Salvation is God's forgiveness of our sins, our restoration to fellowship with him, and eternal life (see 1 Peter 3-9). Salvation is the end of our separation from God and the complete restoration of God's will for us in our lives. On the Last Day, we will be raised from the dead ourselves to be what the resurrected Christ is now (1 Corinthians 15:20-22; and see also Acts 24:14-16).

When we discuss salvation, we speak of our "election": our calling by Christ to new life in him (see 1 Peter 1:1-2). We speak of our "sanctification," which is our "being made holy" as God is holy, in the Body of his Son Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). We speak of our "justification," which is our being restored to a full relationship with God in Christ whose own justice (or righteousness) is accepted by the Father in place of our corruption (see Romans 5:16-19). We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by grace through faith, and not for our own good works or deservings (see Articles X through XV, beginning BCP 605). Faith is the essential precondition of justification (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Romans 5:1-2).

Can I earn salvation?

No. Salvation is the work of God: the Father forgiving; the Son propitiating and teaching; and the Holy Ghost inspiring and sanctifying. We receive salvation as a gift of love from the Father, by the Son, and through the Holy Ghost; and we are made saints by that love.¹⁷